

Our Wesleyan Heritage After Two Centuries

PAUL STROMBERG REES

II

Has Psychology a New Relevancy?

Not many years have passed since *psychology* was a word that was pretty definitely restricted to college campuses and formal textbooks. Today it is used, along with the closely related word *psychiatry*, by educated and uneducated alike. Recently I was called to a poor and shabby home to talk with a woman who in all probability never passed beyond an eighth-grade education. She wanted me to tell her what I knew about a certain psychiatrist and a private hospital to which he was attached as a member of the staff.

Modern Americans are getting liberal doses of psychology. Sometimes they take the medicine in very mild and sugar-coated form, as when by the hundreds of thousands they read Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*; and sometimes they get it in more forthright and professional fashion, as when, again by the thousands, they read Henry Link's *The Return to Religion* and *The Rediscovery of Man*.

Has all of this immense development in psychological investigation, and in the techniques of mental and spiritual therapy, any bearing upon our distinctive beliefs as those who stand in the Wesleyan succession? Has modern psychology discredited our views on sin and holiness, or has it been otherwise? Are there contributions which we may well receive at the hands of those who have been experts in personality problems? These are some of the questions that I venture to raise in this second address.

Immediately one feels like throwing out a word of caution—both for himself and for those who listen. We do wisely if we

remember that the field of modern psychology presents an enormous amount of confusion. On today's market are almost as many brands of psychology as there are breakfast foods. They range all the way from the materialistic behaviorism of Watson and the atheistic psycho-analysis of Freud to the Christian dynamism of Weatherhead. So if some one says, "Psychology is a good thing," or its opposite, "Psychology is a bad thing," in either case it is fair to retort, "*Which psychology?*"

In general it may be said that all non-Christian psychologists tend to go wrong when they cease to *describe* and begin to *philosophize*. Freud, for example, found that in actual cases there was a close interlocking of religion with the phenomena of sex. Had he remained objective and given his professional attention to the traceable connections, no exception could have been taken. It was when he proceeded to the speculative—and altogether superficial—conclusion that religion is nothing but a form of sexuality that he ceased to be a good psychologist and became a crude philosopher. His theory, it should be added, has been modified even by his most brilliant followers.

Turning now to certain specific considerations, what has come to light, according to the best findings of modern psychology, that may be said to bear significantly on our Wesleyan view of human nature and its remaking in the image of God?

I.

Consider, to begin with, what Professor Ligon call the "concept of integration." As

a definition of integration in the psychological sense, Ligon offers the following: "Integration is the condition of a personality in which all of the emotional attitudes are harmonious and mutually helpful, thus permitting all of one's natural energy to be directed toward one end." He then goes on to say that "the most universally recognized source of integration, and therefore of mental health, is a dominant purpose in life."

Now surely it is not difficult to detect the resemblance between this teaching and the Biblical-Wesleyan doctrine of full sanctification. When Mr. Wesley was pressed for a definition of Christian Perfection he replied that it was "loving God with all our heart and serving him with all our strength. Nor did I ever say or mean more by perfection than thus loving and serving God."

Wesley would say with Paul, "This one thing I do!" In so saying both of them would be in the vanguard of modern psychological theory with its insistence upon the necessity of an integrated mind.

We may say, then, that holiness means "wholeness," which is quite literally what the old Saxon word for 'holy' does mean. It insists, with the finest psychological warrant, that "a double minded man is unstable in all his ways." He is like the little girl who, when delayed and frustrated by indecision, was prodded by her mother who said, "Now, hurry up, Mary, and make up your mind." To which Mary's only response was a sigh and a protest: "It's easy for you to make up your mind, mother, for you've only got one mind to make up, but I've got lots of minds to make up." Some of us can remember a time, even after our conversion, when we too were weakend and sometimes defeated because of the divided loyalties and sentiments that found shelter within us.

Then came a deeper surrender, a more enlightened faith and a fuller invasion of the Spirit of God, with the result that we could sing:

Now rest my long divided heart,
Fixed on this blissful center, rest;

Nor ever from my Lord depart,
With Him of every good possessed.

II.

Closely related to this matter of personality integration is the insistence of the mental experts that the realization of it is universally hindered by *self-centeredness*.

Take, for example, Dr. Link's definition of personality. Says he: "I define personality as the extent to which the individual has habits and skills which interest and serve other people. . . . Its emphasis is on doing things with and for others. Its essence is self-sacrifice, not self-gratification." While this definition says nothing about the outgoing of the personality toward God, it nevertheless enunciates a principle upon which the literature of Christian sanctity has insisted through the centuries: the principle, namely, that our realization of the meaning and goal of Christian living is bound up with the teaching of Jesus that "he that saveth his life shall lose it," but "he that loseth his life for my sake shall keep it unto life eternal."

The psychologists, of course, have their own more or less professional terms, which at times appear to be obscure, but which, upon interpretation are found to yield extremely interesting facts. To illustrate, one will find that when a writer or lecturer talks about "emotional infantilism," the thing that he is really dealing with is some more or less acute form of selfishness. Here is a sample from Holman: "What are some signs of emotional infantilism? First it is the inability of the individual to release himself from the control of the elemental impulse. We have heard of more than one man who thought it was an evidence of his virility and strength to say, 'I want what I want when I want it.' This is not maturity; it is infantilism."

In general it may be said that the theory lying back of such pronouncements is this: that basically the inherited human instincts are just three. They are (1) the self instinct, (2) the herd instinct, and (3) the sex instinct. The first is individual, the

second is social, and the third is a combination of both. In infancy and early childhood the self-instinct is predominant. The little child is the center of its world—everything must come his way. As the herd instinct comes into play there is clash. Somehow, if the personality is ever to find its fulfillment there must be a healthy balance between these instinctive urges and between the emotion and sentiments that gather around them.

The non-Christian psychologist would say that there is nothing abnormal about these instincts; and he, by purely human processes and resources, would strive for the achievement of balance. The Christian psychologist, upon the contrary, would say that, while they are not intrinsically sinful, they are radically perverted. He would say that the self instinct is a stronghold so fortified and formidable that it can never, by human resources alone, be shattered and dissolved into a selfness that is not self-centered. In this connection I can quote with utmost approval a magnificent sentence in Volume II of Niebuhr's *Nature and Destiny of Man*: "It can be, and has been, argued with equal cogency, that without repentance, that is, without the shattering of the self-centered self, man is too much his own God to feel the need of, or to have the capacity for, knowing the true God." In that statement, I might point out, the word "repentance" is made to cover more ground than *we* would make it. In our theological way of speaking we would say, "Without repentance, conversion, and sanctification."

That statement stands, nevertheless, as a worthy utterance, especially so in light of what Niebuhr goes on to say in the very next sentence: "The invasion of the self from beyond the self is therefore an invasion of both 'wisdom' and 'power,' of both 'truth' and 'grace.'"

III.

Another area in which the psychologists have been working industriously, and which is of vital interest to us who believe in holy and harmonious living, is that of

personality conflicts and their management. Conflicts are of two general types: those which arise between the various forces and drives within the individual and those which develop between the individual and his society or group. While there is an interrelationship between the two, it is the question of conflicts within the individual that primarily concerns us here.

Let us assume that the fundamental factor in personality conflict has, from the Christian point of view, been removed. That is to say, let us assume a case in which love for Christ has become the dominating and the undisputed master-motive in our living. By "undisputed" I mean that the purpose and set of the soul have been caught up into an absorbing and all-coordinating loyalty to Christ. The question now arises: Will there be any experience of conflict in the life of such a person? In other terms, will psychology and the realism of life support us in the statement, frequently heard in Wesleyan circles, that when we are entirely sanctified the battle is transferred from the inside to the outside? Here, I think, is an illustration of how easy it is for us to be tricked by the sheer magic of words. Any battle in life that is a battle to *me* is on the inside. You can't have experiences without an experimenter, and you yourself are the experimenter. That must always be an *inner* fact.

Now what is the nature of a conflict-experience that may come to one who, in psychological language, is fundamentally integrated toward and around God's will, or, in our traditional way of speaking, is living a holy life? We spoke earlier of the self instinct, the herd instinct, and the sex instinct. Not one of these is destroyed by the invasion and control of Perfect Love. Upon the contrary they are hallowed and redirected.

Take the sex instinct. Admittedly it is one of life's deepest and most powerful driving forces. When its needs and desires are felt, a psychologist would probably say that a situation is created in which one has four alternatives open to him. The first is *expressionism*. It is the method of resolving a conflict—the conflict between sex and

conscience or between sex and social conventions—by giving free rein to the sexual appetite. That is the procedure which some pseudo-psychiatrists have in the past recommended. For the most part, however, it is just the silly conclusion that some popular writers or lecturers have drawn from certain investigations made by the pioneering psychologists of the day. It would be hard to find a reputable psychiatrist who would deny that the method of expressionism produces, in time, far more conflicts and far worse disorders than it is supposed to cure.

The second possibility is to take the way of *suppressionism*. Since there is no morally justifiable or socially acceptable way of expressing the desire, one consciously restrains or inhibits it.

The third alternative is what is known, somewhat technically, as the method of *repressionism*. This is not the same as suppressionism. As Professor Ligon puts it, in repression the person "not only does not express his desire, he does not even admit that he has it." It is a form of self-deception and usually leads, if long continued, to numerous complications. The repressionist is engaged in the impossible business of getting rid of a life force that God Himself has bestowed. Instead of getting rid of sex, however, the repressive type of person only pushes his urges and impulses down into the unconscious self where they eventually shape his unconscious behavior. Every expert in personal counselling has to be on his guard for such symptoms as extreme prudishness or puritanism, aversion to the opposite sex, morbid fears and queer obsessions. They point, as a rule, to a repressionist method of resolving our conflicts in the realm of sex.

The fourth procedure for dealing with this particular experience of conflict is that of *sublimation*. By sublimation the psychologist means the process of redirecting the impulses of sex, when denied full physical expression, into channels that will satisfy the conscience, and, better still, serve the welfare of others. It should be added, in all fairness, that sublimation does not as a rule absorb or drain off *all* of the en-

ergy of the sex instinct, but it will serve effectively to prevent one from getting a bad conscience or going neurotic.

The distinction between repression and sublimation might be illustrated by the example of two maiden ladies, well advanced in years, who worked in the same institution. One of them had a way of saying that she "never wanted to marry and never saw the man she would have." At the same time her behavior raised grave doubts as to how far she was "kidding herself." She was often rather silly in her conduct and could usually be depended upon to be very attentive to any man who came near her. Those who knew her were not challenged to admire her so much as they were moved to amusement by her. She was a repressionist with regard to sex. She was not disposed to face the facts, or to handle the unconscious inner conflict in a more intelligent way.

The other lady took the frank view that marriage is the natural estate for a woman. She was honest enough to say that she regretted she had never married. On the other hand, since she did not, she was resolved neither to hide the fact of sex from her own eyes or consume her energies in useless regrets over her disappointment in life. She gave herself to her work with a full measure of energy. She loved people and sought to be helpful to them. She possessed a healthy mind, exerted a wide influence and was profoundly respected. Her case would illustrate the process of sublimation.

And when we say process, we mean just that. Receiving the gift of love's fulness, whereby we are inwardly united in allegiance to the mind of Christ, may be the crisis of an hour or a moment; but resolving and controlling those conflicts that from time to time arise in the area of the natural instincts are processes that require constant, prayerful, and intelligent direction. The same Paul who said, "Put off the old man," declared, "I keep under my body." The first may be thought of as a deliverance; the second must be thought of as a discipline. The language which Paul uses, as when he speaks of bringing the body

into subjection, indicates conflict. It speaks of tension. I see no point in denying it. Only let it be remembered that the conflict found its solution—its practical management if you will—in continuous sublimation and self-control.

It is time for us frankly to admit that no once-for-all gift of holiness is going to solve the problems that arise in connection with so basic and powerful a factor as sex. We have seen too many moral disasters among the preachers and professors of sanctification! Nor does it cover the difficulty to say that they were hypocrites all along. There are too many evidences that at one time their communion with Christ was an unbroken and unsullied reality. But somewhere along the way they failed at the point of self-control and sublimation. Perhaps they have failed to pray as they should have done. But there is another 'perhaps'—perhaps they failed to provide other channels for the release of biological energies that were seeking satisfaction. So simple a device as vigorous physical exercise, along with prayer, might well have saved them from humiliation, from a broken career and a broken heart.

IV.

Briefly let us add that psychology has its own way of confirming the Wesleyan technique of soul-healing. The early Methodist 'class meeting' was a clinic in personal spiritual problems. It was a Protestant version of the 'confessional.' Our altar services and our more private conferences between ministers and troubled souls represent something that, in principle at least, has the approval of psychiatric experts. William James once put it in a powerful and pungent piece of professional advice to those who desired to be made whole, emotionally and spiritually. He said, "Exteriorize your rottenness." Bring the hidden wrong out in the open.

If the confession of those things which your conscious mind tells you are wrong does not bring you healing, seek the counsel of someone who can probe you at the deep-

er level of your unconscious mind. Something may need to be dredged up out of the long forgotten past. This is a form of what is often called psycho-analysis. It is what a psychiatrist does when he takes a case-history of a patient. It is picking a patient to pieces to see what is mentally, emotionally, and spiritually wrong. It has its value, but, as carried on by non-Christian psychiatrists, it also has its limitations. One man of means came to a friend of mine for spiritual help. He said that he had spent sixty thousand dollars on psychiatrists and still was a frustrated, defeated, and unhappy individual. They had picked him to pieces—including his pocket-book—but they had failed to put him together again.

That is where Christ steps in. He still says to broken, divided, disillusioned men and women: "Wilt thou be made whole?" It is here that our Christian message, full-bodied in its inclusion of holiness of heart and life, succeeds where psychology fails. G. A. Studdert-Kennedy, an English clergyman, had this in mind when he wrote about the modern psychologist.

He takes the saints to pieces,
And labels all the parts,
He tabulates the secrets
Of loyal loving hearts.
He probes their selfless passion,
And knows exactly why
The martyr goes out singing,
To suffer and to die.
The beatific vision
That brings them to their knees
He smilingly reduces
To infant phantasies.
The Freudian unconscious
Quite easily explains
The splendor of their sorrows,
The pageant of their pains.
The manifold temptations
Wherewith the flesh can vex
The saintly soul, are samples
Of Oedipus complex.
The subtle sex perversion,
His eagle glance can tell,
That makes their joyous heaven
The horror of their hell.
His reasoning is perfect,
His proofs as plain as paint,
He has but one small weakness,
He cannot make a saint.